1918
1919

Revolution

in Hungary

REVOLUTION IN HUNGARY

1918 and 1919

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The people of Hungary are celebrating a series of important historical anniversaries. The Hungarian bourgeois democratic revolution took place fifty years ago; the Hungarian Communist Party was founded on November 24, 1918; the Hungarian Republic of Councils was proclaimed on March 21, 1919.

This pamphlet gives an account of these events. It has been written by Janos Kende, Lajos Gecsenyi and Antal Steinbach of the Budapest Institute of Party History, Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party.

HUNGARY BEFORE 1918

The years 1848 and 1849 saw a bourgeois revolution and a war of independence in Hungary. After the military defeat of this revolution in August, 1849, Hungary's independence as a state was obliterated.

Habsburg absolutism, dividing the country into regions governed by a military and administrative bureaucracy, integrated Hungary into the Austrian Empire economically and politically. Even so, victorious reaction was not able to reverse the abolition of serfdom, the main achievement of the revolution.

Austria's defeats in the military and foreign policy fields in 1859 and 1866 compelled the ruling circles within the Empire to seek reconciliation with their strongest internal enemies—the liberal landowners of Hungary who had led the 1848-49 revolution. This was vital for Austria, since the repeated setbacks showed up the weakness of her position.

The middle ranks of the Hungarian nobility were also ready for a compromise. The experiences of the 1848-49 revolution had clearly shown that a revolutionary solution to the crisis would make it necessary to grant new concessions to the peasantry and the national minority groups living within Hungary. This they were not prepared to do.

So in 1867 the Compromise agreement between the Austrian and Hungarian ruling classes was reached. Through mutual economic and political concessions this established a temporary consolidation and—also temporarily—maintained the position of the now dual Austro-Hungarian Monarchy as a great power in Eastern Europe.

The 1848-49 revolution and war of independence laid the foundations for bourgeois development in Hungary.

The Compromise confirmed the laws enacted in 1848 which opened the way for bourgeois development, for example by establishing democratic liberties. The Compromise put Hungary's ruling classes at the helm of the nation yet they hastened to deprive non-Hungarians living within the country's borders of their elementary national rights, the free use of their language and the development of their culture, in order to keep them in subjugation.

Capitalist development, and the beginnings of the working class movement

The Compromise regime naturally did not touch the division of the land, and the emergence of capitalist property relations in agriculture only further exaggerated the ratio of big landed estates to the small peasant farms. At the turn of the century a third of all the land was in the hands of the big landowners, who represented about one in a thousand of all landowners, while only about half of the total land was owned by farmers with holdings of less than 140 acres.

However the capitalist development of agriculture also had its positive side. During the first half of the Dual Monarchy period, the land under cultivation increased, livestock went up by 30 per cent, and the average wheat crop harvested went up by 60 per cent.

Industry started to develop vigorously during this period, with a corresponding increase and development in the working class. Just after the turn of the century, industrial workers numbered more than 750,000.

The relatively rapid capitalist development also embodied the leaven of decay within the Compromise regime. The economic and political power of the Hungarian ruling class was consolidated in the years of comparative calm up to the turn of the century.

Capitalist development brought in its wake the emergence of a bourgeoisie within Hungary's national minority groups, who demanded political and economic rights from the Hungarian ruling class.

The small landowner and the landless peasant were threatened by the political and economic power of the big landowners, they lagged behind in the capitalist competition and were deep in debt. From the turn of the century on they showed their discontent through movements which became more and more stormy.

In the first years of the 20th Century too the working class and their party, the Social Democrats, appeared on the scene in growing numbers. By 1905, the number of organised workers was over the hundred thousand mark.

These contradictions and forces characterised the early years of the 20th century in Hungary. Rising social forces, intensified by the development of capitalism, wanted a redistribution of power, democratic reforms and the solution of both the agrarian and national minority problems, while those who held power clung to it obstinately, rightly realising that their political regime could not stand even the slightest concession.

In the political struggles after 1910 the camp of those who fought consistently for a bourgeois democratic transformation was strengthened. The Independence Party, which united those peasant, petty bourgeois and small landowner elements who were loyal to the heritage of the 1848-49 revolution, belonged to this camp. Or to be more precise, the left-wing of this party, led by Mihaly Karolyi did. So did the Radical Party which united the most progressive elements of the bourgeois intelligentsia, and the Social Democratic Party, which had the broadest mass basis.

The alliance of these parties—which on a number of occasions was supplemented by other forces—practically speaking remained intact during the political struggles before the First World War, and during the war years.

Hungary and the First World War

The Hungarian ruling class welcomed the First World War as offering salvation, since they hoped it would solve the social, political and nationality problems which threatened the Dual Monarchy.

However it soon became apparent that they were not really prepared for war. To be more precise, they had no idea what the economic effects of the war would be, or how to organise the economy, distribution and so on. They thought it would be enough to introduce emergency laws and order mobilisation, since these two measures would ensure order at home and uninterrupted warfare.

The mobile war waged during the first year of World War I and the great losses suffered on the battle fields of Serbia and Galicia quickly "devoured" the armed forces of the Monarchy, and necessitated the calling up of first younger, then older age groups. Up to the middle of 1915 no account was taken of the needs of production in organising the call up; workers and peasants of the age groups most capable of work were despatched to the front. As a result, industrial and agricultural production fell, and the amount of food on the market decreased. Speculation carried on by the large landowners intensified this lack of food.

In 1914 and 1915 Hungary was supplying three fronts —the Balkan, the Italian and the Russian. The sudden increase in demands raised prices steeply, and the majority of the consumers were unable to pay the exorbitant prices. Only after the first wave of the boom had receded did the government begin to fix maximum prices for food, requisition foodstuffs and introduce a system of rationing.

The market reacted to these measures as it usually does under wartime conditions; the goods which were rationed and price controlled disappeared from the shops.

Between June 1914 and December 1917, the prices of major foodstuffs increased three to six times, household

goods (paraffin, coal, etc.) three to four times, and clothes ten to fifteen times. During the same period workers' wages and salaries went up one-and-a-half to four times, and this only as a result of bitter struggle against the employers.

If we include here the other consequences of wartime —the increasing death rate for adults, children and infants, an upsurge of crime and so on—it is easy to imagine what an explosion was gathering force under the "chattering surface" in the "silent depths."

The military fall of the Monarchy

As the home front of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy fell to pieces so did the battle front. Not even the firing squads could stem the landslide of desertions, defections and mutinies. The dissolution of the Monarchy had begun. National Councils were formed in Ljubljana, Prague and Zagreb. The ex-prime minister, Count Istvan Tisza, the main protagonist of the policy of alliance between the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and Germany, was compelled to admit in Parliament on October 17, 1918: "We have lost the war!"

In the autumn of 1918 the progressive parties in Hungary were not trying to prepare for the forceful seizure of power, but were busy formulating "final warnings;" these summed up the most important tasks for the leading circles of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, if they were to avoid anarchy and bolshevism—in short revolution. These "warnings" naturally included the major demands for a bourgeois democratic transformation—complete independence for the Hungarian state; the guarantee of democratic liberties; the right to universal and secret ballot; the solution of the national problem through free use of minority languages and greater autonomy in local administration; agrarian reform; the introduction of a progressive taxation system. All these were the objectives for which these parties and

their leadership had been struggling for years, indeed for decades.

The tones in which these declarations were formulated differed from each other. While the Social Democratic Party addressed a manifesto to the people of the country, the leader of the radical bourgeoisie, the social scientist Oszkar Jaszi, addressed a memorandum to the King, and the Karolyi party tabled a "proposed address to the Throne" in Parliament, which was also addressed to the King, Charles IV. They formulated their programmes in various ways, but were unanimous in not wanting to take a revolutionary path to realise their aims.

At the extraordinary congress of the Social Democratic Party, held on October 13, 1918, Zsigmond Kunfi who delivered the report, rejected what he termed "Soviet policy," independent action by the working class for bourgeois democratic aims, or for aims pointing beyond them, and declared: "Today in Hungary we are strong enough to take over political power alone."

The government was swept out of power on October 23, 1918 by the news of the occupation of Fiume by rebel Croatian troops. A National Council was formed by the democratic parties, and then began an unending series of political bargainings. One after the other different figures representing the political elements which had led the old Hungary appeared before the King to discuss a way out of the situation; they were followed by the Social Democrats, the Radicals, and Count Mihaly Karolyi.

But as time passed the possibility of finding a "constitutional" solution decreased, even though the parties which had set up the National Council on October 25 (Mihaly Karolyi's party, the Radical Bourgeois and Social Democratic Parties) showed maximum patience and waited with "their guns at their feet." Because of the intrigues of the reactionary politicians, the King procrastinated, and finally refused to name Mihaly Karolyi as prime minister.

THE BOURGEOIS DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION

Writing about this period in his memoirs, Oszkar Jaszi remarks: "The National Council . . . was not considering a forceful revolution . . . as it did not think the situation was ripe for this."

But by then the revolution had already started, regardless of the aspirations of the professional politicians. Demonstrating youngsters broke the official seals which had been used in January 1918 to close the headquarters of the Galileo Circle.* A military council was set up to prepare for an uprising. Hundreds of thousands rallied in front of Parliament on October 27 in support of the National Council. Mass meetings were staged nearly every day in front of the headquarters of the Karolyi party.

The "battle of the Chain Bridge" arose out of one of these meetings. The assembled masses set out for the Buda section of the city to force Prince Joseph, who was in residence in the Royal Palace as representative of the King, to mandate Karolyi to form a cabinet. The Chain Bridge, which the crowds wanted to use to cross the Danube from Pest to Buda, was cordoned off by the police, The police fired into the crowd; three people were killed and 55 wounded. Next day a half hour strike was held in all factories in protest, and the workers began to arm.

According to Jaszi even the most resolute members of the National Council thought on the night of October 30 that "several days of propaganda and organisation

* The Galileo Circle was founded by progressively minded university students in 1908. From the end of 1917 the circle worked as an illegal anti-militarist group. The leading members were arrested in January, 1918 and the circle's offices were closed.

were still needed" for revolution. But the "Bomb" went off earlier. A small number of army units who supported the National Council occupied the city garrison and arrested the officers they found there. Demonstrating soldiers and workers prevented two battalions at the Eastern Railway Station from setting out for the front. Other groups of demonstrators set free the political prisoners in the military prisons.

The revolution had started, but its final outcome was far from being clear at that time. Only about 150 soldiers were assembled in front of the Astoria Hotel where the National Council had its headquarters, and this organised military force did not seem to grow.

Many of the leaders of the revolution disappeared in the period of calm before the storm, and only a few Social Democrats, Radicals and Mihaly Karolyi remained at their posts; they were expecting the arrival of a Bosnian regiment, supposedly loyal to the Monarchy, under Brigadier General Geza Lukachich, the bloodthirsty military commander of Budapest.

But in spite of the rumours, the Bosnian troops did not appear. Instead of the troops of counter-revolution the major force of the revolution—the organised workers—occupied the streets. They carried the day. Prince Joseph, as the King's representative in Budapest, summoned Mihaly Karolyi for a conference in the early morning hours of October 31. There he told him that the King had appointed him as Prime Minister. The news was announced to the assembled masses by Zsigmond Kunfi and Oszkar Jaszi.

The effects of the announcement is most vividly described in Jaszi's memoirs: "We thought that the news would give rise to enthusiasm and that the King would quickly regain his popularity. The opposite happened. After the revolution which had taken place during the night the masses considered that the Karolyi government would be formed in any case. There were rousing cheers for the Karolyi government, but not a single cheer was heard . . . for the King. Indeed, when I

stepped out on the Astoria Hotel balcony to announce to the crowds what the King had decided, I heard people calling out on all sides: The King? Who's the King now? Karolyi wasn't appointed by the King . . . Karolyi is Prime Minister at the will of the revolution . . . Long live the Republic!"

There were many soldiers among the demonstrators. The royal badges were torn off their caps and replaced by the flowers of October—the Michaelmas Daisy. And badges of rank were torn off their regimental facings, either voluntarily or under duress.

The bourgeois democratic revolution was victorious—even if its leaders had not imagined events would take such a course.

The birth of an independent Hungarian Republic

The mood of the masses urged a speedy settlement of what the constitutional form should be. Since the "royal" appointment of the government went together with an oath of loyalty, the newly formed government was in a painful dilemma. The personal integrity of Karolyi and the members of his cabinet made it impossible for them to disregard their oath, so they decided to approach Prince Joseph to ask him to absolve them from it, otherwise they would be forced to resign.

Prince Joseph urgently obtained Charles IV's consent to free the government from the oath of allegiance. When he heard that the Karolyi government wanted to summon a "regular" and constitutional session of Parliament to solve the question of the form of government, he himself urged them to proclaim a republic without any constitutional formalities, because the republican mood of the masses was growing and any delay would harm the government's authority.

It soon became apparent that the hypocritical Prince, who became a "republican at heart" in a matter of

hours, was right. Demonstration after demonstration was staged in favour of a republic, and an avalanche of telegrams poured in to the government, demanding the immediate proclamation of a republic.

Delay could also harm the international position of the country, as the Houses of Habsburg and Hohenzollern had already been dethroned in Austria and Germany and republics proclaimed.

It was in these conditions that an extended session of the National Council decided on November 16, 1918, to pass a "people's decree" proclaiming the Republic; this was confirmed by a huge meeting of about 300,000 people in front of Parliament. The people's decree of 1918, No. 1, stipulated that:

"Hungary is a People's Republic, sovereign and independent from any other country."

This formally registered the fact that an independent, and democratic Hungary had been born out of the October revolution. The people's decree followed this by binding the government to enact popular laws on the following questions:

"a) the universal, secret, equal and direct right of all, including women, to vote in the election of Parliament, municipal and rural district councils;
"b) freedom of the press;
"c) people's jurors;
"d) the right of assembly and to hold meetings;
"e) the allocation of land to those who tilled it, and provision for the immediate implementation of these laws."

The people's decree which declared the Republic, was a kind of summary of the government programme of the bourgeois democratic revolution. The government and the masses both looked on the ensurance of democratic liberties as natural, and even before the corresponding popular laws were enacted in December 1918 and January 1919, these liberties were applied. Seeking out a solution to the agrarian problem and the

problem of the national minorities was a much more difficult task; these were the two major issues which confronted the bourgeois democratic revolution.

The secession of the national minorities

The proclamation of independence only brought a solution to the national problem as far as the relationship between Austria and Hungary was concerned. Settlement of the position and legal status of the national minorities within Hungary was still an open question.

The Karolyi government stood for territorial integrity. There were even some members of the government who considered that the plans for autonomy, along so-called "Switzerland in the East" lines, which were put forward by the minister for nationalities, Oszkar Jaszi, went too far. The national minorities themselves however, were in favour of secession instead of autonomy.

The national minority policy of the Karolyi government, incomparably more democratic in method than former policies, strove to safeguard the old Hungary through concessions, if not as an administrative unit, at least as an economic one. This would have been a bourgeois solution, meeting Hungarian interests.

The bourgeoisie of the national minorities, feeling that they were backed up by the power of the victors, by the bayonets of the French, the Romanians and the Serbs, rejected compromise and forced through a solution which met their own bourgeois interests.

The National Assembly of Croatia-Slavonia on October 29 passed a unanimous decree declaring full and final secession from Hungary. In principle a similar situation was created in Slovakia after the Turocszentmarton declaration of October 30. The Romanians living in Transylvania also declared at a meeting held at Gyulafehervar on December 1 that the territory popu-

lated by them was part of Romania. And on the same day the founding of the kingdom of Serbia-Croatia-Slovenia was proclaimed in Belgrade.

Delays in solving the agrarian problem

The other major problem of the bourgeois democratic revolution was the agrarian question. There was no disagreement that the system of huge estates, originating in feudalism, could not be maintained. Under it nearly half the cultivated land in the country was in the hands of a few thousand landowners, while millions of agricultural workers were without land.

The revolution of November 1918 in the villages showed this. It was aimed not only at individual corrupt parish clerks, the brutal gendarmerie, innkeepers and shopkeepers, but took on an increasingly pronounced anti-landowner character. Attacks against castles and manor houses occurred frequently and were followed by distribution of seed for sowing, livestock and equipment.

The politicians on the left-wing of the revolution (left-wing socialists, the majority of the social democrats, the bourgeois radicals, and Karolyi himself) wanted to solve the agrarian problem without delay. Naturally the majority of them had in mind an agrarian reform which would leave intact considerable estates (of between 280 and 700 acres), and would involve the payment of compensation to the former landowners.

In contrast the agrarian programme put forward by the communists returning home from the prisoner-of-war camps in Russia called for the immediate confiscation of the large landed estates without compensation and wanted to put the right to dispose of the land into the hands of councils formed from the poor peasantry. These councils would decide whether the confiscated land should be turned into a large-scale collective farm or into small farms which could be cultivated by family labour.

The clash between these completely opposed and differing viewpoints led to considerable delay in the enactment of an appropriate law.

The people's decree No. 18, issued on February 16, 1919, offered land to the peasantry on indefinite lease—against the payment of a high rent—and also made it possible to buy the lease after payment of the entire estimated value of the land. Those who had taken part in the "disturbances" of November 1918 were excluded from the land reform.

The major shortcoming of this law was the delay in its enforcement. Only one landowner voluntarily handed over his land to the peasants, without recourse to protracted court procedure: he was the president of the People's Republic, Mihaly Karolyi. On February 23, 1919 he hammered in with his own hands the stakes indicating the peasant farm boundaries on the Karolyi estates at Kalkapolna. Counting on the fall of the bourgeois democratic republic, the big landowners made no haste to follow suit, although in November 1918 the country's biggest landowner, the Catholic Church, had offered its lands for the land reform. But a few months later the Church forgot all about this generous gesture.

Hungary's villages entered the spring of 1919 with the agrarian problem still unsolved. Indeed not even the initial steps had been taken to put the inconsistent and inadequate land reform into practice. The peasantry answered the delay in March 1919 by a nation-wide movement to take over the land, one of the events which led to the founding of the Hungarian Republic of Councils.

The government of the bourgeois democratic revolution made all the preparations to enact modern, social-political and labour laws, to introduce a progressive system of taxation and for a democratic reform of education. (Most of the prepared plans were enacted by the Republic of Councils.) But because of the meticulous adherence to legal niceties, these plans were not realised while the Karolyi government was in power.

Workers and peasants were dissatisfied with the revolution, while on the other hand reaction, emboldened by the weakness of the government, thought that too many concessions were granted and feared that the revolution would become more radical. From the beginning of 1919 counter-revolutionary organisations were uncovered one after the other, and the position of the government was undermined by pressure from two sides.

Meanwhile day by day another power was growing—the power of the workers' and soldiers' councils.

FOUNDING OF THE HUNGARIAN COMMUNIST PARTY

Even from the outset the composition of the coalition government did not reflect the real relations of power within the revolution. The Social Democratic Party, founded in 1890 (the history of the socialist working class movement in Hungary dates back to 1868), was the oldest and largest of the parties which made up the National Council. Only the Social Democratic Party had a membership and organisation.

Before the outbreak of the revolution the number of organised workers was more than 300,000. However much the party leadership tried to keep the S.D.P. in the background as a humble coalition partner, this became less and less possible during the revolution. The right-wing elements of the party leadership who wanted to halt the revolution at the stage of a bourgeois democracy, were forced more and more into the background by the left-wing and centre elements who championed the political independence of the working class against the coalition, demanded the development of the revolution, and wanted to make their real influence felt in the national and local leadership.

The workers' and soldiers' councils, born in the revolution, represented the power of the working class. Although the Social Democratic Party tried to limit their sphere of competence and composition, the councils operated as independent bodies of power, often in a way which differed from official Social Democratic policy.

The political weight of the councils is best indicated by the fact that during the days of the government crisis in January 1919, President of the Republic Mihaly

Karolyi sought out the Budapest Workers' Council and asked them to find a way out.

The village councils in many counties—especially after the first attempts at counter-revolution—drove away the government appointed lord lieutenant and took power into their own hands.

The workers' movement to put workers' control of the factories into practice began at the end of 1918 and gained tremendous momentum in January 1919. In many factories the workers' councils drove away the old management and appointed new directors themselves.

Erno Garami, Minister of Commerce, the most prominent representative of the party's right wing, tried to curb the spontaneous workers' movement—unsuccessfully. At the proposal of Jeno Varga, the March 7, 1919 session of the Budapest Workers' Council favoured the start of socialisation; and when the government met on March 18, 1919, one of the representatives of the centre forces of the Social Democratic Party tabled a draft law on socialisation. The revolution had begun to go beyond the bounds of bourgeois democracy.

Members of the Hungarian communist prisoner-of-war groups, operating in Soviet Russia, had convened a conference in Moscow on November 4, 1918, when they heard of the Hungarian bourgeois democratic revolution. This conference favoured the immediate founding of a communist party and passed a resolution that members should return home. Accordingly Bela Kun, the leader of the group, and three others arrived in Budapest on November 17; they were followed by many more prisoners-of-war who aimed at founding a Hungarian Communist Party. The efforts of Bela Kun and the other members of the group were crowned with success. As a result of negotiations with various left-wing groups, the Hungarian Communist Party was founded on November 24, 1918.

Break-through of the revolutionary forces

In the conditions created by the bourgeois democratic republic, the Communist Party immediately took the lead in the struggle to continue development of the revolution. Without the Communist Party this development would not have been possible. The Communist Party gave the movement a clear goal, put into words the demands of the working class for power, and at the same time defined the immediate tasks.

The party mobilised the masses in defence of the bourgeois democratic regime, against the hesitation of the bourgeoisie and above all against organised counter-revolution. At the same time the party presented the masses with a programme suited to developing the bourgeois democratic revolution into a socialist revolution, and created a mass basis for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Important points of this programme were: the immediate introduction of workers' control in the factories; effective measures to abolish unemployment: regular assistance to demobilised soldiers and the disabled, to be paid from war profits; arming of the people against counter-revolution. All this evoked a nation-wide response and rapidly increased the influence of the party among the masses. One after the other Communist Party branches or groups were set up in the factories, localities, towns and villages.

The specific conditions under which the party was founded had a strong influence on its position. The Hungarian Communist Party was born in revolution and immediately had to lead a revolution without having time to prepare for this and organise its ranks. Nevertheless the party was able to stand its ground successfully and to fulfil its highly responsible social function.

Provocation at the end of February 1919 and the anti-communist campaign waged by the right-wing of the

social democrats were in vain; so was the arrest of party leaders (which, by the way, was opposed by Mihaly Karolyi and also by representatives of the centre grouping of the social democrats, such as Minister Zsigmond Kunfi). The reputation of the communists and the popularity of their programme increased, and the stimulating effect of communist views could be felt increasingly in the left-wing of the social democrats.

The stand of the communists and the left-wing social democrats, which became closer and closer, offered a solution to the problems which could not be solved by the bourgeois democratic revolution. On March 21, 1919, when the ultimatum of the Allied Powers had placed the bourgeois government in an impossible position, it became clear that this was the only platform for a government. Recognising this, Mihaly Karolyi put the fate of the country and the nation in the hands of the proletariat, submitting his resignation.

PROCLAMATION OF THE HUNGARIAN REPUBLIC OF COUNCILS

The struggle waged by the Hungarian working class achieved its aim on March 21, 1919: for the first time in the history of the country the workers took power into their own hands.

The immediate event which led to this was the fiasco suffered by the middle-of-the-road, "above class" policy of balance followed by the bourgeois democratic government, which was aimed at helping the masses while at the same time respecting private property. Both the masses and the property owning classes became disillusioned with this policy, first turning away from it, then against it.

The final blow to this policy came when faith in Wilsonism* and the Allied Powers met with disaster. When the victorious great powers—to satisfy their allies—presented unacceptable territorial demands, the government of the "Michaelmas Daisy" revolution, which had lost confidence both at home and abroad, was forced to resign. It prepared to hand over power to one of the coalition partners, the Social Democratic Party.

Amalgamation of the two workers' parties and the seizure of power

The Social Democratic Party however, as one of the participants in power, had lost popularity among the

* A reference to the fourteen points put forward by President Woodrow Wilson of the United States.

people. The masses were by now directing far more attention to the new workers' party, the Hungarian Communist Party, in which they saw the only possibility of realising their just demands and aspirations. The communists proclaimed that the cart of revolution, now at a standstill, could only be pulled out of the mire if the working class seized power and established a dictatorship of the proletariat.

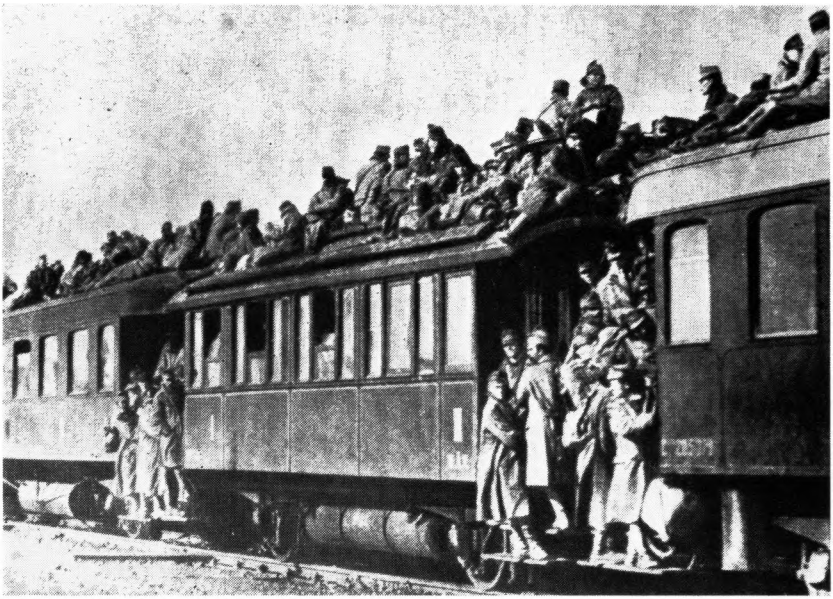
This is why on March 21, 1919, the leadership of the Socialist Democratic Party did not dare take over government; lacking the united support of the working class they could not undertake this task alone. They were forced to follow their rank and file and to reach agreement with the imprisoned leaders of the Hungarian Communist Party to unite the two workers' parties.

Under this agreement the two parties—the Hungarian Communist Party and the Hungarian Social Democratic Party—united on the basis of communist policy, taking the name of the Hungarian Socialist Party. The agreement not only stipulated the union of the two parties, but also stated that the seizure of power, and the dictatorship of the proletariat would be realised through the workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils.

A new government was formed and named the Revolutionary Governing Council. The chairman was a Social Democratic politician, Sandor Garbai, and Bela Kun became Commissar for Foreign Affairs—and the guiding force of the new government. The formation of the Revolutionary Governing Council meant that the working class had taken power in Hungary. The bourgeois democratic revolution had burgeoned into a socialist revolution, and the Hungarian Republic of Councils came into being.

In Hungary for the first time in the world, the socialist revolution had been won and the dictatorship of the proletariat set up in a peaceful manner.

The union between the two parties was one of the conditions for the peaceful seizure of power, for at that

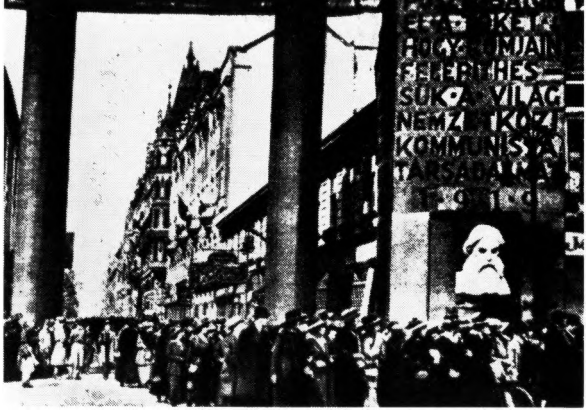


THE END OF THE WAR: Hungarian soldiers return from the front and (below) women queue for food in Budapest

KÖZTÁRSASÁGOT!

THE FIRST REPUBLIC: Count Mihaly Karolyi, President of the new Hungarian People's Republic, in his castle grounds which he turned over to the public; (below) soldiers demonstrating in Budapest wear the Michaelmas Daisy, symbol of the 1918 revolution in their caps; (opposite) "For a Republic!" proclaims this dramatic poster from the period.

THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC: Bela Kun, the acknowledged leader of the 1919 Republic of Councils; (top right) part of the vast crowds which greeted the proclamation of the revolutionary republic; (bottom left) voting for new councils in the April elections; (bottom right) a poster proclaiming "Proletarian Power".



MAY DAY, 1919: Three views of the vast May Day procession which marched through the streets of Budapest. The centre picture shows a group of women trade unionists with their banners.

THE RED ARMY: The call to arms is illustrated above by this famous poster by Robert Bereny; the response was typified by the hastily formed workers' battalions which formed the basis of the Red Army which was to put up such a tremendous struggle in defence of their Republic.

FIRST CLASS CITIZENS: Working class children were among the first to benefit under the Republic of Councils; (above) children play in the grounds of the one-time Royal Palace at Godollo; (below) a group of Budapest children set out for their first ever holiday at Lake Balaton.

time there was no force in Hungary which could even consider opposition to the united forces of the two workers' parties. One part of the social democratic leadership was constrained to join the united party, in spite of conviction to the contrary; they were not sincere adherents of the need for a dictatorship of the proletariat and centred their later activities on overthrowing it. But there were only one or two social democratic leaders who openly opposed the fusion.

Another group of social democrat leaders, the centre group and workers' delegates, joined the ranks of the united party with sincerity and enthusiasm. The difficulties and problems encountered later made them vacillate and, whether they wanted it or not, made them potential supporters on the inside of the aggression launched against the Republic of Councils.

There was also a significant group of social democrat leaders whose entry into the united party represented a great gain for the socialist revolution. These were the leading left-wing social democrats, who stood their ground till the end, and fought shoulder to shoulder with the communists to maintain working class power.

The statements put out by Count Mihaly Karolyi, the ex-president of the bourgeois republic, exercised a big influence on the whole of society. Karolyi, even if he had no intention of assisting the founding of the Republic of Councils, recognised that what happened was inevitable. This explains why in one of his press statements he acknowledged only one obligation: "to work with all my strength for the sacred cause of saving my fellow citizens."

The people of Hungary welcomed the proclamation of the dictatorship of the proletariat with unanimous enthusiasm. Huge mass rallies throughout the country greeted the setting up of the Republic of Councils. Workers received the re-establishment of the unity of the working class with pleasure; poor and poverty-stricken peasants greeted the Republic of Councils in

hopes that it would realise to the full their desire for land.

Workers throughout the world, like the Hungarian people, also greeted the victory of the Hungarian working class with tremendous enthusiasm. When he heard of the birth of the Hungarian dictatorship of the proletariat, Lenin sent greetings in the name of the 8th Congress of the Communist Party of Russia (Bolshevik). The best representatives of Austria, Germany and other nations took an enthusiastic stand on the side of the Hungarian workers' state. Class conscious workers living in neighbouring countries gave many signs of their solidarity.

For the Communist Party, because it had been founded so recently and because of weaknesses in the revolutionary development of the working class, the union with the social democrats represented a premature though necessary step. The union helped to create working class power and so, if the Hungarian Communist Party wanted to act as a revolutionary party, there could be no hesitation. The will of the working class called for this without vacillation.

The ink had hardly dried on the document of union, which signified the setting up of the Hungarian Republic of Councils, when military units under revolutionary leadership took over control in the streets of Budapest and occupied the major strategic points. The masses swarmed into the main streets—as they had done at the end of October 1918. Speakers at spontaneous street meetings explained the new situation. During the night delegation after delegation reported to the secretariat of the Hungarian Communist Party with statements of loyalty to the dictatorship of the proletariat.

On the morning of March 22 in every street in Budapest people read the proclamation of the Revolutionary Governing Council—the government of the working class state. Beginning with the words "To Everyone!", the proclamation announced what had happened and set out the main objectives of the new state, without hiding that the coming struggle would be difficult.

Developing the system of councils

In the provinces power was taken over in all the major towns and villages as in Budapest. There was no resistance or disturbance worthy of note. The proletariat, represented by the workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils, became the wielder of power.

On the afternoon of March 21, the Governing Council issued the first fundamental decrees of the new state. These abolished titles and ranks, separated Church from State, created revolutionary courts with lay judges, and set out how the provincial administrative regions—the counties—should be governed. They decreed preparations for the election of workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils. The People's Commissar for Socialisation was instructed to start immediate work on drafting proposals to nationalise factories and tenement houses.

A few days after taking over power the workers began to build the organisation of their young state. This organisation was built on the broadest foundations—the system of people's councils which embraced legislation, law enforcement and the power of the courts. The National Assembly of Councils became the supreme body of state power. When the Assembly was not in session, its powers were exercised by a 150-member Central Federal Executive Committee. Under the Constitution of the Republic of Councils, the Central Executive Committee elected the members and chairman of the Revolutionary Governing Council.

The Revolutionary Governing Council decreed that the direction of the police force, administration, banks and financial institutes, the ensurance of food supplies, the sequestration of art treasures and the maintenance of uninterrupted production should come under the authority of the councils.

The Governing Council considered it was important to confirm the local councils, which had been formed provisionally, through universal elections as soon as

possible. Immediate preparations for the elections were therefore put in hand.

The elections were held between April 7 and 14, 1919 in a spirit of enthusiasm. Workers and poor peasants, women, young people between the ages of 18 and 24, previously deprived of the franchise, were able to vote for the first time. The only people who could not vote were those who lived on unearned income, were mentally disturbed, or had been deprived of civil rights because of criminal activities. The ballot was secret.

The overwhelming majority of the new council members were industrial and agricultural workers. As the few months during which the Republic of Councils existed showed, the new bodies of state power in general lived up to their responsibilities, successfully solving the complex tasks of organising economic and cultural life. All over the country they acted with initiative and independence. They strove to solve problems without any bureaucracy, in a revolutionary manner.

They drafted large-scale plans for the development of towns and villages, for building homes and developing production. But time was too short for the majority of these plans to be realised.

Internal measures

The Hungarian Republic of Councils considered that its primary task was to overthrow the old property relations and the rule of private property, to nationalise the means of production and hand them over to the workers. At the end of March, 1919, the Revolutionary Governing Council issued a decree nationalising the banks and financial institutions, the mines, and the industrial and transport companies. All industrial and transport companies which employed more than 20 persons became public property.

The nationalisation of the wholesale trade took place at the beginning of April. Artisans and small traders continued to operate undisturbed.

Every nationalised enterprise was placed under the direction of the working class as a whole, and was controlled by the workers in the factory concerned. The working class was represented by a production commissar, appointed to direct the enterprise; the factory workers were represented by a workers' council, elected by secret ballot.

A decree socialising the land was issued by the Revolutionary Governing Council at the beginning of April. The government of the Republic of Councils made all medium-sized farms and large estates public property. On the other hand small farms and tiny plots, up to 140 acres in size, remained in the hands of their owners and cultivators, the working peasantry. The lands which were made public property were handed over to the agricultural workers from the former estates to be farmed co-operatively.

The Revolutionary Governing Council made a serious mistake in not distributing part of the appropriated land to the small plot holders and those who owned no land; they would have seen this as a fulfilment of their long-standing and just demand for the distribution of the land. It is true that in certain regions, where the poor peasants strongly urged distribution of the land, they were allowed to cut out plots of between 2.8 and 7 acres. Household plots were also distributed all over the country to those who had none. But this was not enough to satisfy the century-old land hunger of the peasantry.

The Hungarian Republic of Councils passed a whole series of social measures to make up for past deficiencies. One of the decrees issued by the Revolutionary Governing Council declared: "Only those who work and who contribute to society by the work of hand or brain, have a right to live in the working class state. The Republic of Councils therefore orders the introduction of compulsory work, at the same time establishing the right to work. The state must support those who are unable to work, together with those who want to work, if the state is not able to provide employment for them."

The Republic of Councils raised the real wages of workers, clerks and low-paid teachers by an average of 25 per cent. It introduced the eight-hour working day and raised overtime rates substantially. (The rates laid down were time and a half for the first two hours and double time for each additional hour.) Night work carried a 20 per cent wage bonus. On the basis of the principle "Equal pay for equal work!", the Revolutionary Governing Council ordered that women should be paid the same as men for similar work.

The most notable improvement in living conditions applied to the hired workers and servants on the former landed estates—they had led the most poverty stricken existence under earlier conditions. Under the Republic of Councils they were allotted between 56 and 58 hundredweight of wheat annually, compared with the 24 to 32 hundredweight allotted before the war. Other produce allotted to them in kind was increased to a similar extent. The government of the Republic of Councils also strove to ease the conditions of peasants who cultivated their own land by granting them tax exemptions.

One of the most important measures introduced laid the foundations for a universal sickness and accident insurance scheme. The government extended sickness and accident insurance to all those working "in public or private service for wages or salary." Social insurance also covered agricultural workers and household servants. The working peasant was also given the opportunity to insure himself if he wanted to.

In order to set up a uniform structure for social insurance, the workers' state nationalised the various insurance companies and sickness benefit funds and put them under central control.

In the case of sickness or accident, the scheme paid sickness benefit to the insured person for up to a year. In the first four weeks of disability he received 60 per cent of his wages, and from the fifth week 75 per cent. If he had a family to support, he received sick pay

amounting to 100 per cent of his wages from the 27th week of disability.

The pensions paid to the disabled, to war widows and to war orphans were also increased.

The Hungarian Republic of Councils helped to ease the severe housing shortage among the working class. Tenement houses were made public property and a start was made on redistributing flats. It was decreed that one single family could only own a three room flat at the most.

On this basis working class families were moved into the spacious flats of the rich which were unoccupied. In this way in the capital alone 31,410 working class families (amounting to more than 100,000 people) received homes fit for humans.

The workers' state strove to provide a home with at least a room and a kitchen to the families of agricultural labourers living in the villages or on the former big estates.

Care was taken to prevent speculation in housing, and to see that the available accommodation went to those in greatest need. The rent of small flats was reduced by 20 per cent and back rent, which had accumulated during the war, was cancelled.

The Hungarian Republic of Councils devoted great attention to providing protection to mother and child. One of the first decrees issued stated: "The Hungarian state does not recognise a different status for the illegitimate child." Mothers were granted six weeks maternity leave, with full pay in the form of sickness benefit.

Even in the extremely difficult post-war conditions of food shortage—accentuated by the economic blockade imposed by the Allied Powers—the state made strenuous efforts to improve food supplies for children, providing them with milk and other foodstuffs with a high protein content.

Official child protection was also introduced. A system of school doctors to give regular care and supervision to the health of school children was set up.

The callous exploitation of industrial apprentices was ended. It was laid down that apprentices must not be employed for more than eight hours a day (including time devoted to theoretical education) and must not be used to do chores (housework, for example) which did not come within the trade they were learning.

The state also provided holiday facilities for children, appropriating the country mansions of the aristocracy and the private holiday resorts of the rich bourgeoisie for this purpose. They planned to provide holidays on the shores of Lake Balaton for 10,000 working class children during the summer of 1919. More than a thousand did get their holiday, but the overthrow of the Republic of Councils prevented the plan from being carried out to the full.

During the short period of its existence the Hungarian Republic of Councils also endeavoured to set up a uniform health service in the interests of the workers. To this end all private hospitals, clinics, sanatoria and spas were nationalised. To ensure the democratic management of health affairs, the workers elected local, district and county health committees. Free-of-charge health treatment and care was introduced on May 1, 1919.

Special attention was focused on safeguarding the health of the factory worker. Holidays for factory workers at health resorts were introduced. Particular care was taken to disseminate knowledge on public health matters. For example, a widespread propaganda campaign was launched against alcoholism.

The Hungarian Republic of Councils set out to eliminate the monopoly of the exploiting classes in the intellectual field, in other words to carry out a cultural revolution. As a fundamental step, Church was separated from State in the field of education as well. Eighty per cent of the elementary and 65 per cent of the secondary schools were in the hands of the church at the time.

Schools belonging to the church and private persons were nationalised, with the aim of unifying the education system. Compulsory education was introduced for

children up to the age of 14. Attendance at both elementary and secondary schools was made free. A campaign was launched to modernise the out-of-date system of secondary and higher education.

The Republic of Councils also provided for adult education. War was declared on illiteracy and courses were organised all over the country to overcome it. Famous experts and scientists gave popular lectures for the culture-hungry workers. A mass of literature dedicated to popularising and disseminating knowledge was published.

Theatrical performances, concerts and film shows were organised for the workers. The elite of the country's artists and intellectuals took an active and enthusiastic part in the cultural work of the Republic of Councils. They included the poets Gyula Juhasz, Lajos Kassak, and Arpad Toth; writers Bela Balazs, Gyula Krudy and Zsigmond Moricz; Gyorgy Lukacs the philosopher; painters Robert Bereny, Bertalan Por and Bela Uitz; sculptors Beni Ferenczy and Ferenc Medgyessy; the composers Bela Bartok and Zoltan Kodaly, and many more.

It is also significant that the Republic of Councils was the first state in Hungary's history to grant complete freedom to the national minority groups living within the country's borders. The leaders of the dictatorship of the proletariat at all times acted on the principles of a socialist nationality policy, and this question is given due importance in the fundamental documents issued by the Republic of Councils.

The rights of national minorities were established in the Basic Principles of the Constitution of the Hungarian Federal Republic of Councils. These declare that every nationality has the right to the free use of its own language, and may freely develop and cherish its own culture. The obligation to set up independent districts where national minorities populated sizeable and continuous territory was written into the Principles. Im-

mediate steps were taken to set up two such districts—a German and a Ruthenian.

The dictatorship of the proletariat made fundamental changes in the juridical system. The work of the former court bodies and attorney offices was suspended. The majority of members of the civil and military revolutionary courts were lay judges selected from the ranks of the workers, who gave judgment with great discretion and humanity on the basis of unwavering devotion to working class power.

The government saw clearly that sooner or later armed hostilities would inevitably break out with the neighbouring bourgeois states. The organisation of a new, effective army was a matter of vital importance for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The decree of March 25, setting up a Red Army, was issued in this knowledge. The soldiers of the new, working class army were drafted on a voluntary basis. On the basis of the experiences gained in Soviet Russia, political commissars were appointed to supervise officers from the former Royal Army, who were accepted into the ranks by force of necessity.

The Governing Council decreed the formation of workers' battalions and regiments within the army, to serve as a reserve in the struggle against internal counter-revolution and external intervention. The members of the workers' units trained after work, their weapons were stored in magazines where they worked. The international regiments formed by Russians, Austrians, Yugoslavs, Slovaks, Poles and Romanians in Hungary were of special significance.

Imperialist conspiracy to overthrow the Republic of Councils

Naturally the organisation of the Red Army could not be carried out from one day to the next. This is why the

assault launched by the imperialist armies on April 16 found the army of the working class still undergoing organisation.

The news of the victory of the Hungarian Republic of Councils had aroused uncertainty and no small degree of alarm among the victorious great powers and the bourgeois states which bordered in Hungary. Although no common viewpoint had yet been established, first reactions abroad were overwhelmingly in favour of immediate intervention. However there were differing views regarding the actual measures which should be taken.

American and British politicians considered that "peaceful means" would be the best way to overthrow the Hungarian Republic of Councils. French leaders on the other hand advocated military intervention from the outset, encouraged by the presence of French troops in the Balkans and the similar viewpoint adopted by the bourgeois governments of Romania and Czechoslovakia.

These two latter states, alarmed by the possible spread of communist ideas and hoping to satisfy their territorial demands, called urgently for armed intervention. With this in view, they extorted considerable deliveries of food and ammunition out of the Allied Powers. In the days following the proclamation of the dictatorship of the proletariat, they alerted their armies and were ready to attack at a moment's notice.

The use of open military intervention was made more difficult because the government of the Hungarian Republic of Councils repeatedly stated that it was not demanding "territorial integration," had no warlike intentions and was prepared to settle all problems peacefully. This was stressed in the note sent to the four leading powers at the Paris peace conference by People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Bela Kun.

As a result the "Council of Four" on March 30 adopted the proposal put forward by the British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, to send an Allied mission to Hungary. Headed by General Smuts, the mission was to gather

information and conduct talks with the Republic of Councils government.

The Smuts mission carried out talks in Budapest on April 4 and 5. These talks could have been the start of further negotiations, but even the small results achieved by the mission were swept away by the attack launched by the Royal Romanian Army on April 16. While the Allied mission was in Budapest, Romanian and Czechoslovak politicians were urged to act by the French government and military.

In their opinion the success of speedy intervention against the Hungarian Republic of Councils would present the Paris peace conference with a fait accompli. Czechoslovak government troops, with the consent of the French, joined in the action aimed at overthrowing Hungary's working class state at the end of April.

The political and military leaders of Romania and Czechoslovakia tried to present their aggression as a legal and justified act of "self-defence." However, one of the leaders of the Romanian high command put their aims in plain language: to prevent the spread of communist propaganda.

The fight against external reaction

The Romanian army attack on April 16 with superior numbers on its side pushed back the weaker and less organised Red Army towards the Tisza river. The success of their attack was aided by the treachery of a Hungarian army division, one of the most combat-ready, but led by counter-revolutionary officers. In a matter of days the situation on the Transtisza front became critical.

The Czechoslovak army attacked from the north and French-Serbian units started to advance from the south. Czechoslovak troops occupied the town of Miskolc and its surroundings, one of the key industrial centres of the country. French-Serbian forces seized several important towns on the plains. Romanian troops reached

the Tisza in the first days of May, and were only just over 60 miles from the capital.

The Revolutionary Governing Council was convened on the night of the first free May Day, (which had been celebrated most impressively) to seek a way out of the grave situation. In the name of the government Bela Kun gave a frank outline of the situation to representatives of the Budapest workers. Following his speech, the majority of the Revolutionary Council voted to defend the Republic of Councils and decided on a general mobilisation of the Budapest working class.

The entire proletariat took up arms within a matter of days. This united action also had a positive influence on those who were primarily inspired by patriotic feelings and not by class interests in their desire to take part in the defence of the country.

The workers' regiments soon showed their mettle on the battle fields. Salgotarjan, another industrial centre threatened by the troops of bourgeois Czechoslovakia, was successfully defended by armed units formed by the local workers. When the gravest danger had been averted, by the defence of Salgotarjan and by the temporary strengthening of the Tisza front, reorganisation of the Hungarian army began without delay. By the middle of May the Hungarian Red Army consisted of 113 battalions The high command was taken over by Aurel Stromfeld, a staff colonel who was an outstanding soldier and patriot.

The reorganised army soon started to counter-attack. This began with an attack by the Red Army in the direction of Miskolc on May 20. The action was successful, in spite of counter-attacks by Czechoslovak and Romanian troops. This was soon followed by a large-scale campaign in the north. Actuated by political and economic considerations, the attack aimed at cutting the lines of communication between the Czechoslovak and Romanian armies, to paralyse first the Czechoslovak, then the Romanian troops.

Between May 30 and June 6 the blows delivered by the Hungarian Red Army completely routed the Czechoslovak units and as a result the French military commander at Kassa ordered the town to be evacuated on June 6. The Hungarians and Slovaks living in the territory liberated gave an enthusiastic welcome to the Hungarian Red Army units. Crowds of men enlisted in the army. Behind the lines of the Czechoslovak army, activities in support of the Hungarian Republic of Councils increased.

The liberation of a major part of Slovakia presented the Slovak workers with the opportunity of setting up their own state. The Slovak Republic of Councils was proclaimed at Eperjes on June 16.

The Hungarian Republic of Councils concluded a fraternal alliance with the Slovak working class state. Slovak workers, having created their own state, did not relinquish their earlier efforts to unite with their Czech working class brothers in a common state. After its formation, the Slovak Republic of Councils took steps to promote Czechoslovak state unity, a Czechoslovak Republic of Councils which would be the joint state of Slovak and Czech workers. The Hungarian Republic of Councils gave full support to these efforts.

The struggle against internal reaction

As the interventionist attacks came from the outside, the former ruling classes started to become active at home. They recovered themselves from their surprise at the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which had driven them into the background. A series of intensive counter-revolutionary rebellions started at the beginning of April, reaching its peak in June.

The strike of railway workers in the Transdanubian region, and a series of armed uprisings in the Danube-Tisza region and in south-west and south-east Trans-

danubia, were all part of a well organised and co-ordinated campaign.

The largest and most dangerous counter-revolutionary rebellion took place in Budapest on June 24, when a group of army officers tried to overthrow the dictatorship of the proletariat, believing that the factory workers would join them. However, this attempt, like those before it, met with speedy failure because it lacked a social basis, because the workers took quick and decisive action, and because of the thorough, deterrent work done by the security bodies of the Republic of Councils.

The organisations set up abroad with the support of the great imperialist powers played a big role in organising counter-revolution at home. Among them were the "Anti-Bolshevik Committee" set up by emigre landowners and army officers in Vienna and the counter-revolutionary government set up at Arad, under French occupation, which later transferred to the town of Szeged.

Colonel Cunningham, head of the British Mission in Vienna, actively supported the counter-revolutionary organisation in that city, while the counter-revolutionary Arad, then Szeged, government enjoyed the protection of the French troops in the area.

In spite of the various counter-revolutionary movements and the supply difficulties which arose from time to time, the congress of the Hungarian Socialist Party (followed by a conference of the councils, the bodies of state power) was called first and foremost as a token of the Red Army's victories. The most important questions for the Hungarian Republic of Councils were included on the agenda—the programme of the party, the country's economic and international position, and the drafting of a final text for the Constitution.

At the party congress, where communists from various countries enthusiastically greeted the party of the Hungarian proletariat, major attention was focused on the speech made by Bela Kun, the acknowledged leader of the Republic of Councils. His report contained

an analysis of the process which had led to the dictatorship of the proletariat, and pointed out that the only way in which the working class could reach socialism was through the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The draft programme of the party declared affiliation to the Communist International and emphatically stressed the importance of the alliance between the industrial and agricultural proletariat, and the significance of the national minority and agrarian questions. When its work was over the congress adopted a new name for the party—the Hungarian Socialist and Communist Workers' Party.

The National Conference of Councils was convened on June 14, a day after the party congress ended. According to the provisional constitution of the Republic of Councils, every 50,000 workers were entitled to send one delegate.

The draft of the new constitution was endorsed at the conference. This constitution was already more detailed than the provisional one which had been elaborated by the Revolutionary Governing Council.

The constitution of the Hungarian Socialist Federal Republic of Councils stipulated among other things:

"In the Republic of Councils, the proletariat has taken over all liberties, rights and powers, with the aim of eliminating the capitalist system and the rule of the bourgeoisie and replacing them with a socialist order of production and society . . .

"The Republic of Councils is a republic of workers', soldiers' and agricultural workers' councils . . .

"The Republic of Councils is a free association of free peoples . . ." And the constitution put on record: "The Republic of Councils does not recognise racial or national discrimination."

It dealt in detail with the structural organisation, sphere of authority and tasks of the central bodies of the Republic and of the local councils.

Diplomatic intervention

During the party congress the leaders of the Republic of Councils learned that the Allied Powers had decided to resort to diplomatic intervention in order to help the Czechoslovak bourgeoisie—who were in a critical situation as a result of the victorious Red Army campaign.

Notes signed by Premier Clemenceau of France, on behalf of the great powers, were published on June 7 and 13; they demanded that the Red Army should cease maneouvres and withdraw behind an indicated truce line. In return for the acceptance of these conditions the great powers promised to recognise the Republic of Councils and extend an invitation to attend the Paris peace conference; Romanian troops were to be withdrawn from the occupied territories.

The leaders of the Republic of Councils answered the notes after serious deliberation. The replies pointed out that it would be proper to summon a conference of the new national states which had been set up on the ruins of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, in order to settle debated questions and clear up problems. However, until such a conference could be convened, the Hungarian Republic of Councils, led by a desire for peace, accepted the conditions offered by the great powers.

The fact that affairs within the Republic of Councils needed to be stabilised, because of the counter-revolutionary movements and the activities of the right-wing social democrat leaders, was a major consideration in accepting the notes. This acceptance was to become a decisive factor in the future history of the working class state.

The communist and left-wing social democrat leaders expected that the momentary pause in the war of defence would allow for the consolidation of power, an improvement in workers' conditions, and an improvement in the international situation. As Bela Kun pointed out during the discussion of the notes at the Conference of Councils,

it was important for the country to conclude peace, to establish economic contacts with neighbouring countries and to shape a foreign political situation in which the Hungarian Republic of Councils would be able to explain to the workers of neighbouring countries that it was against any kind of national oppression. He believed that, even if peace was concluded under unfavourable conditions, it would not last for long as it would be broken by the working class of the victor countries themselves.

These were realistic ideas, but the decisions were taken before any guarantees were received from the great powers that the promises contained in the Clemenceau notes would be carried out. As a result, when the Governing Council issued order to evacuate the territories liberated by the Red Army, on June 29, 1919, this course was taken without any guarantees.

Superior enemy forces overthrow the Republic of Councils

The leaders of the dictatorship of the proletariat committed a grave mistake in ordering a one-sided withdrawal. As a result of the withdrawal from Slovakia, the Slovak Republic of Councils fell. At the same time the Allied Powers did not keep their promises. The bourgeois government of Romania announced that Romanian interventionist troops would only be withdrawn from the occupied areas after the resignation of the Republic of Councils government.

The withdrawal of the Hungarian army and the Romanian government statement gave rise to bitter disappointment among the people of the country, and above all among the soldiers of the working class army. This unfavourable effect undoubtedly diminished the mass basis of support for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Aurel Stromfeld resigned from his post as Commander in Chief of the army. The deciding factor in his resolve was that he did not see any use in his efforts to strengthen the army and to organise the defence of the country after the acceptance of the Allied Powers ultimatum.

Left-wing members of the Revolutionary Governing Council worked to the utmost in the deteriorating situation to consolidate the internal situation. Steps were taken to settle economic problems, and general conscription was introduced to strengthen the army. They resolved as a decisive step to liberate the Transtisza territories occupied by the Romanian army by force, and so compel the imperialist powers to keep their promises.

The telegram sent by Clemenceau on July 15, on behalf of the Allied Powers in Paris, clearly indicated their final stand against the Hungarian Republic of Councils. In it he announced that the peace conference was not willing to conduct any kind of negotiations with the government of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The Hungarian Red Army started military operations on July 20, aimed at liberating the Transtisza territories. However, counter-revolutionary officers headed by Chief of Staff Ferenc Julier, who had infiltrated into the army high command, betrayed the planned disposition of forces and line of attack to the Romanian high command. Because of this treachery, the initially successful advance was quickly halted and then crumbled under counter-attack. The retreating Red Army fell completely apart, allowing the Romanian troops to cross the Tisza river without any resistance. The road to Budapest stood open.

The defeat of the Red Army, destroyed by treachery, was a mortal blow to the dictatorship of the proletariat. The masses were engulfed by despair and bitterness. Another blow was added to the defeat on the battlefield: the world solidarity strike, scheduled for July 21,

did not bring the expected results in the major capitalist countries.

The frustration of the hopes placed in the world strike was the crowning disappointment for those who based the entire fate of the dictatorship of the proletariat on an approaching victory of the world socialist revolution. The unfavourable turn in the world situation had already brought many disappointments.

The westward advance of Soviet Russia's Red Army had been halted; the Bavarian Republic of Councils had fallen; the June action of the working class of Vienna had been defeated. These reverses had already undermined the belief of some of the leaders and a section of the masses that the Hungarian Republic of Councils would be able to maintain itself.

On August 1, a combined session of the party leadership and the Governing Council was compelled to agree to the resignation of the government. The Revolutionary Governing Council subsequently submitted its resignation, and handed over power to a government formed by trade union leaders.

The revolutionary war of defence was not in vain

In the afternoon the representatives of the Budapest workers met for the last time. The resolution passed by the Governing Council was read to the conference. Finally Bela Kun addressed the workers' representatives.

When he finished his speech, the audience in the conference hall rose to its feet and applauded for minutes on end. Thus they took leave of the man who, even if formally he was only a member of the government, was recognised by friend and foe alike as the leader of the Hungarian dictatorship of the proletariat.

The combined attack launched by the forces of imperialism succeeded in overthrowing the Hungarian

Republic of Councils after 133 days of struggle. But the short period of its existence was not in vain.

For the first time in the history of the Hungarian people, the working classes had established power, and used this power for the benefit of all workers. Although the few months of power had to be devoted primarily to a war of defence, the economic, social and cultural measures passed, and the treatment of the national minorities—mistakes and all—these gave shining evidence of the ability of the liberated working class, applying a communist policy, to lead the nation.

The socialist struggle which was waged interrupted the Allied Powers in their war of intervention against Soviet Russia. Considerable forces which the Allies wanted to throw in against Soviet Russia in the spring and summer of 1919 were deflected and engaged. In this way the Hungarian Republic of Councils was able to grant revolutionary assistance to the first working class state in the world and to contribute what it could to the survival of that state.

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